

# Mayor against CPS plan

## Will write to DEP to deny expansion

By CAREN CHESLER  
Staff Writer

**OLD BRIDGE** Claiming that CPS Chemical Co. acted irresponsibly last week after one of its reactors released a cloud of chemicals into the air, Mayor Barbara L. Cannon plans to write to the Department of Environmental Protection asking them to deny the company's application to expand its operations.

"The lack of cooperation, and their failure to report [the accident] in a timely manner lends more reason for their permit being denied," Cannon said.

CPS has applied for a state permit to receive, treat, and incinerate its own chemical wastes, as well as hazardous substances from its sister plant in Arkansas. Company officials said they expect to hear back from the state agency within a month.

"Their whole credibility is shaky, to say the least," said John J. Coughlin, township business administrator. "We have no confidence in the operation, and what they tell you at critical times."

Company officials believe the accident last week should have no bearing on their application.

"There are specific regulatory and statutory regulations we have to meet, and we have done that," said Mark Rogart, general counsel for CPS. "We think we will get approval."

In the meantime, local officials are waiting to see whether employees of Conrail, who were injured in the accident, will file a civil suit against the company.

Six Conrail employees were working July 27 near the reactor that released a cloud of chemicals, and all had to be treated at the Meridian Bay Medical Center, Old Bridge Division for nausea, burning eyes, and throat irritation. Workers Thomas Black and Michael Underwood remained in the hospital for five days because of respiratory problems.

Conrail has refused to send any more of its employees to the site until it has proof of their safety.

"We've told the company that we're not going to service them until we're satisfied that it's a safe environment," said Bob Sullivan, Conrail spokesman.

By most accounts, the accident July 27

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# Cannon to ask DEP to say no to CPS plan

## Handling of accident upset town

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was caused when lightning struck a reactor at about 8:30 p.m., bending an 18-inch pipe and blowing a disc in one of the pressure valves. When the disc blew, a 50- to 100-foot plume of chemicals was released a dead fish-like odor into the air that spread as far as Woodbridge. The chemical, known as dimethylaminoethyl acrylate methyl chloride quaternary, is used to purify water.

Township police and fire officials are angry about the fact that the fire department, which responded to a call about an explosion at the plant, was left waiting outside the gate for about 10 minutes. Once inside, CPS employees provided fire and police officials with very little information about the nature of the accident, and the type of chemicals released.

Local and county officials believe the plant's manager was aware of the accident from the very beginning and failed to release the information.

The Middlesex County Health Department's Division of Environmental Health plans to cite CPS for two violations, the more

serious being a failure to report the release of chemicals immediately.

"Most companies abide by it. I'm surprised they didn't call somebody. I imagine [the plant manager] thought it was serious enough that he had to talk to his lawyers first," said Alan Lauritsen, supervisor of the Air Pollution Program at the county health department.

The matter will be turned over to the DEP, as the violations refer to state codes, and the state will determine whether the company will be fined. CPS was just forced to pay a penalty of \$197,530 in June that was levied by the DEP for contributing to chemical contamination in the Runyon Watershed, which provides drinking water to Perth Amboy, Old Bridge, and South Amboy.

On the local level, the Old Bridge Police Department completed an investigation of the incident and found no criminal wrongdoing on the part of the company.

"We're not happy about [the incident]. We're a little disappointed, and we're probably even mad about it, but criminally, there is nothing we can do," said Lt. Robert Bonfante.

John -  
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interesting  
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